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Family and Consumer Sciences Grad Named Finalist for Teacher of the Year

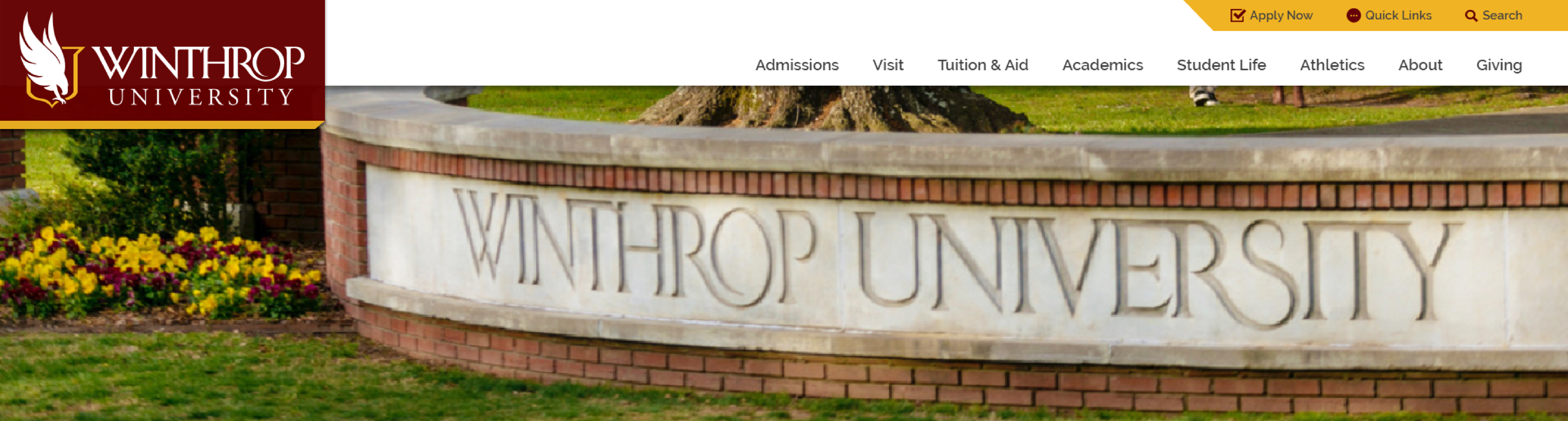
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Family and Consumer Sciences Grad Named Finalist for Teacher of the Year

March 20, 2018

Quick Facts

- Robert Harris '12 teaches family and consumer sciences to grades sixth-eighth at Hand Middle School, located in Richland County School District One.
- As a finalist, Harris received \$10,000 and moves on to the next stage of competition featuring an in-person interview.



ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA -- March 7 began like any other day for **Robert Harris**. The 2012 Winthrop University graduate was preparing for his family and consumer sciences class when suddenly **S.C. Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman** and several media outlets burst into his classroom with a gigantic check and a bouquet of balloons. **(See a video here.)**

The reason: Harris is one of five finalists for **South Carolina Teacher of the Year**. The winner will be announced at the gala on May 2 in Columbia.

Harris teaches family and consumer sciences to grades sixth-eighth at Hand Middle School, located in Richland County School District One.

Judges noted he's a "community-minded educator who hopes to encourage his students to live a productive and fulfilling life in which they can impact their communities."

"Robert is the proud product of Richland One schools and strives to identify and connect with his students to promote their learning," Spearman said in the state Department of Education's news release. "In just a short time in the classroom, he has exhibited dedication and commitment to instruction that are models for the state."

Harris treats his classroom as an innovation center, with his students being the learning team and he their facilitator. Initiatives have included:

•A mock "Cupcake Wars" project; and

•A project in which students partnered with an English/language arts class to develop business plans for a mock restaurant and collaborated with restaurant managers, business owners and bank officials in that Columbia community.

Beyond the classroom, Harris has served as a mentor and leader in district and state-wide events, including a district teacher forum and Profound Gentleman Recruitment Day, which recruits aspiring African-American male educators for the classroom. He was also named the Palmetto Citizens Youth Financial Educator of the Year and District Teacher of the Year.

Harris called being a state finalist a "great honor."

"I value this recognition because it shows that hard work truly pays off," he said. "Every day I strive to impact my students, but also my colleagues and my community. Teaching is a rewarding profession, and I appreciate the opportunity to work with great teachers and amazing students every day."

As a finalist, Harris received \$10,000 and moves on to the next stage of competition featuring an in-person interview. The overall winner will receive a total of \$25,000 and a new BMW to use while serving for one year as a roving ambassador mentoring, attending speaking engagements, working with Teacher Cadets and Teaching Fellows, leading the State Teacher Forum and serving as the state spokesperson for more than 48,000 educators.

The Teacher of the Year program celebrates excellence and strengthens the teaching force by honoring and recognizing exceptional teachers on the district, state and national level. The Teacher of the Year Awards not only assist in retention efforts but serve as a powerful recruitment tool to the educator profession.

Past Teachers of the Year who have been Winthrop alumni are **Nancy Elizabeth Baker '79** (1999); **Christi McCollum '85** (2002); **Bryan Coburn '88** (2010); and **Darleen Sutton ~90** (2014). Many others have been finalists.

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